

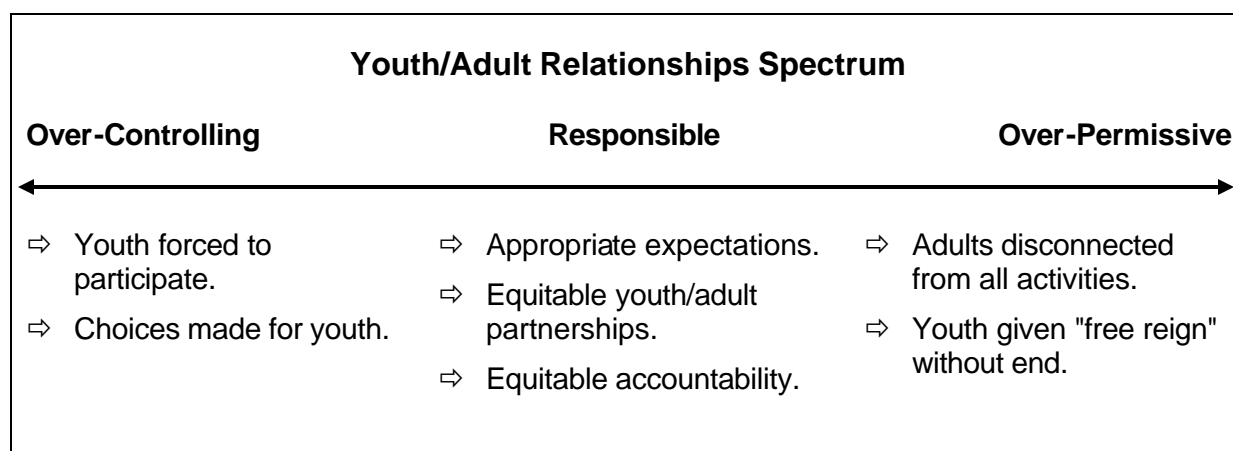
# Principles of Youth Voice

*Partially adapted from the Washington Youth Voice Handbook by Adam Fletcher*

**Youth Voice: the active, distinct, and concentrated ways young people represent themselves throughout society**

- ⇒ **Active:** Engaging young people intentionally instead of coincidentally.
- ⇒ **Distinct:** Young people are seen as having their own views that are separate from those of adults around them.
- ⇒ **Concentrated:** Engaging young people in a focused way. Ensuring that youth are given the personal, structural, political, and financial support needed to be effective.

## Responsible Youth/Adult Relationships



On the one end of the spectrum, over-controlling youth/adult relationships reflect an assumption that youth are always plotting trouble and will never make good choices. On the other end, over-permissive youth/adult relationships reflect an assumption that youth are always ready and able to do the right thing and will always make good choices.

Responsible youth/adult relationships reflect an understanding that youth sometimes make good choices and sometimes make poor choices. They also reflect an understanding that youth are not miniature adults but are still growing and developing. They are about adults guiding youth. Both youth and adults should consider the responsible relationship a partnership.

## **Principles of Youth Voice**

### **Respect: You give it, you receive it.**

Mutual respect and an appreciation for each member's contributions to the partnership are vital.

- ⇒ A culture of respect provides all participants opportunities to act on their dreams and learn from their mistakes.
- ⇒ Young people respect adults who listen and ask challenging questions.
- ⇒ Adults respect young people who invite them to share their skills, experiences, and resources.

### **Communication: Listen up.**

An honest and open exchange of ideas is crucial.

- ⇒ All people's ideas and opinions are valuable and must be heard.
- ⇒ Young people are best heard when adults step back and young people speak up.
- ⇒ Adults are best heard when they are straight forward and explain where they are coming from.

### **Investment: It takes time.**

Investing in the future is accepting young people as leaders today.

- ⇒ Young people and adults must first set their fears aside and take a chance on each other.
- ⇒ Adults must provide young people with the information, training, and support they'll need to succeed. They must also develop their own abilities to work with young people.
- ⇒ Young people must commit their time and energy to do the work and be willing to learn from adults.

### **Meaningful Involvement: Count us in.**

Decisions about young people should be made with young people.

- ⇒ Involving young people from the beginning builds ownership.
- ⇒ Adults need to support young people in taking on responsibility.
- ⇒ Reflection helps everyone appreciate the importance of their work – for themselves, their program, and their community.

## **Youth Voice and the Roadmap**

The *Roadmap to Civic Engagement* is about empowering youth and increasing youth voice. The Principles of Youth Voice should be built into how members facilitate the curriculum with youth. Below are some questions to help facilitators think about how to promote youth voice and leadership throughout the curriculum.

### **The Facilitator's Role in Building Youth Voice**

- ⇒ How are facilitators being held accountable for their role? For example, what happens if a facilitator breaks one of the ground rules established in Unit 1?
- ⇒ How does your perspective differ from the perspective of the youth with whom you are working? What can you learn from them?
- ⇒ Who is making the final decision on what the service project will be? How can you ensure that youth have the necessary information to make that choice responsibly?

### **Youth Participation and Choices**

- ⇒ Are youth choosing whether or not they participate? If they are not, how can you ensure that they still feel empowered from the process?
- ⇒ Are you encouraging youth to speak their honest opinions, even if you disagree with what they are saying?
- ⇒ What wisdom and knowledge do your youth have that you do not have? How can you give them the opportunity to share that wisdom and knowledge?
- ⇒ How much choice do the youth have in how they celebrate their accomplishments during Unit 7?

### **Promoting Youth Leadership throughout Facilitation**

- ⇒ How can you build small leadership roles for youth into unit facilitation? Can youth help facilitate portions of the curriculum?
- ⇒ If you are doing exploratory service projects, what role are youth playing in choosing and organizing those projects? How can exploratory service projects help youth build skills that will help them with the larger project chosen during Unit 6?
- ⇒ What knowledge or skills do your youth need in order to plan a successful project? How will you help them gain that knowledge or build those skills?